



# Improving Employee Performance Through Coaching

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## ***Management in State Government***

*Comprehensive Public Training Program (CPTP)*

*Sponsored by the Governor's Office and the Department of State*

*Civil Service*

# Improving Employee Performance Through Coaching

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Service*

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# IMPROVING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE THROUGH COACHING

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## Course Description

This class presents the coaching process and strategies for improving employee performance. Participants will learn to recognize employee performance problems that need coaching, to prepare for a coaching session, and to conduct a coaching session. In addition to the coaching process, the course also explains the corrective feedback process.

## Job Outcomes

- ☒ Helping others learn through informal and formal methods
- ☒ Identifies training needs
- ☒ Provides constructive feedback
- ☒ Coaches others on how to perform tasks
- ☒ Inspires, motivates, and guides others toward goal accomplishment

## Learning Objectives

- ☒ Diagnose the cause of employee performance problems
- ☒ Prepare for a coaching session
- ☒ Conduct a coaching session
- ☒ Discuss when to use corrective feedback and counseling

## Coaching

Coaching involves the informal, day-to-day communication between employees and their supervisor, which includes:

- Rewarding positive performance that meets or exceeds expectations.
- Correcting behavior that does not meet performance expectations.
- Helping to improve performance, even when performance is satisfactory.

## Managers as Coaches

Performance management should be more than the annual performance review. Consistent informal day-to-day communication and feedback is essential to improving and sustaining employee performance through changes and challenges in the workplace. Coaching involves a different skill set than managing.

COACHING: Facilitating, mentoring, teaching, guiding, exhorting, enabling, and nurturing people in their self-awareness, self-belief, and skill development

MANAGING: Governing, directing, controlling, monitoring, evaluating, appraising, and holding people accountable to performance expectations

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## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

- Coaching takes a lot of time
- Coaching is mentoring
- Coaching is just for fixing problem behaviors
- Coaching is just a fad
- Coaching is best left to HR professionals
- Coaching is just part of the disciplinary process

**What are your misconceptions about Coaching?**

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# MENTORING AND COUNSELING

## Mentoring

A mentor is usually senior to the employee (protégé) and is usually outside of the chain of command of the protégé. A mentor guides and fosters a protégé's professional growth by giving advice which helps to advance the skills and career development of the protégé. Mentoring can be either formal or informal in nature:

### Formal mentoring

- Mentor and protégé are matched by senior staff, with an eye toward organizational and individual goals.
- The length and scope of the mentoring relationship is structured.
- The frequency of contact and the learning experience is structured.

### Informal mentoring

- Mentor and protégé pair with each other spontaneously, and the focus is usually on the goals of the protégé.
- The length of the mentoring relationship can be short-term or long-term.
- Frequency of contact and the learning experience are unstructured.

## Counseling

Counseling involves the formal communication (verbal or written) with an employee regarding his/her work behavior or performance, particularly with regard to behavior or performance issues that the employee should attempt to improve. This includes:

- A description of the behavior or performance issue that is a problem.
- Information about how the employee is expected to behave or perform in the future.
- Explanation of why the behavior or performance was unacceptable (when appropriate).



### Group Discussion

Brainstorm a list of skills and characteristics of an effective coach. Think about good coaching experiences that you have had as a coach or as an employee being coached.

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## A COACHING ISSUE



## Individual Exercise

Give an example of an employee performance problem that may require coaching. Make notes in the space indicated below. You will be discussing this example in your group later on, so please do not use names.

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# DETERMINING THE CAUSE OF A PERFORMANCE PROBLEM

## 1. Make sure the employee understands that there is a performance problem in the first place.

If an employee does not understand that he or she has a performance problem, most solutions used by the supervisor to address this problem will not succeed.

If the employee does not understand that there is performance problem:

- The supervisor should focus on resolving the differences in perception through two-way communication.
- The employee does not have to like the fact that there is a performance problem, only acknowledge that there is one.

If the employee understands that there is a performance problem:

Go on to Step 2.

## 2. Determine if the performance problem is based on the employee's ability or motivation.

Use “**Questions for Evaluating a Performance Problem**” (see the table on page 10). These questions are a useful tool for the supervisor to answer in order to properly identify the performance problem he or she is faced with.

**When accessing a performance problem, always look for ability-related causes first.**

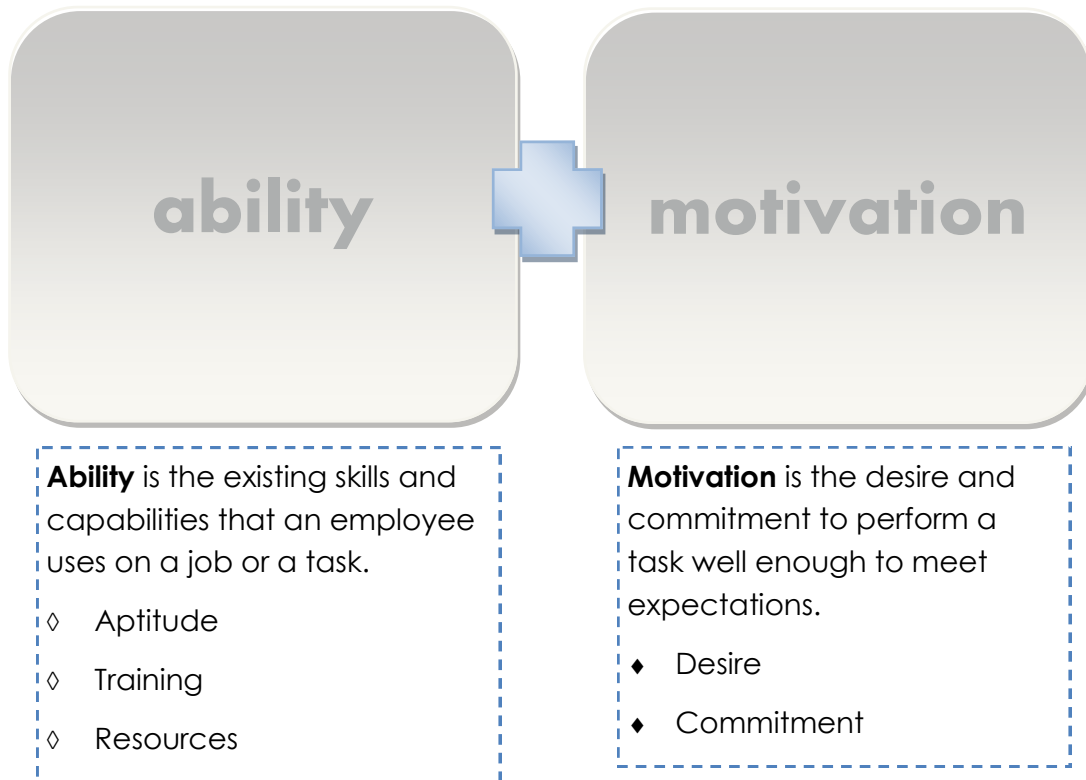
## 3. If the performance problem is ability-related, address the specific issue that is causing the performance problem:

- Aptitude
  - Training
- } Coach using the “GROW” approach (on page 13).
- Resources – not solved with coaching or motivation solutions

## PERFORMANCE DEFINED

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Supervisors need reliable information about an employee's performance in order to know when and how to address an employee's performance issue. This includes properly identifying the performance issue, evaluating the issue and documenting the issue. Performance is a function of *both* ability and motivation. Both elements of performance function together.



- An employee with up-and-down performance on the same task, over time, likely does not have an ability problem. Put another way, an employee who has performed a task well enough to meet expectations but who slips backwards in performance on occasion does not have an ability problem unless the methods, the equipment, or the resources to perform the task have been changed.
- An employee who is persistently giving enough effort to complete a task, but has never performed it well enough to meet expectations does not have a motivation problem. Put another way, an employee who is trying hard to accomplish a task but is getting nowhere has enough motivation (look at the effort), but that employee probably has an ability-related problem that needs to be solved before the employee gets demotivated and becomes harder to reach.

*See appendix for motivation related performance problems and ability-related performance problems.*

## EVALUATING A PERFORMANCE ISSUE

Questions for Evaluating a Performance Problem	
<b>Ability</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Does the employee have the capability to do the tasks assigned to him or her?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>physical and technical capability?</li> <li>interpersonal ability (work with people)?</li> <li>appropriate education/experience level?</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>Has the employee been properly trained?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>any changes in the job/task or in the procedure for completing the job/task?</li> <li>any changes in technology or equipment used to complete the job/task?</li> <li>enough on-the-job training and guidance from the supervisor?</li> <li>enough real-world practice doing the task?</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p><b>Does the employee have the right resources?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>functioning equipment and tools?</li> <li>materials and supplies?</li> <li>enough time to do the task well?</li> <li>the completed work of others?</li> <li>timely access to necessary information?</li> </ul>
<b>Motivation</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>How hard is the employee trying to complete the task?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>starts tasks but does not finish them?</li> <li>get discouraged with tasks that don't go smoothly?</li> <li>confident that he or she can succeed?</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>How much improvement is the employee making?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>employee's work is unacceptable even though he or she is giving effort?</li> <li>good performance only occurs when the employee is closely monitored?</li> <li>willing to listen and learn in order to improve?</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<p><i>Note: The 5<sup>th</sup> question is the "quality check" on the first 4 questions. If the answers to the first 4 questions are positive, then the last question should have a positive answer also. If not, then the supervisor missed something in answering those first 4 questions and must go back for a closer look at the answers to the questions.</i></p>	



When you present your situation to the class, tell the story and then say whether the problem is ability or motivation. The instructor may ask for more detail, but you do not need to explain every answer to each of those questions.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## VIDEO: THE COACH



During the video, note the good examples of coaching that you see, as well as the coaching examples that need improvement. We will discuss these observations with the class after the video.

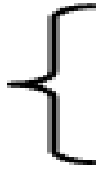
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# COACHING FOR PERFORMANCE– THE GROW APPROACH

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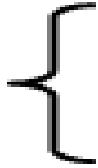
Goal



- what is your goal?
- What would you like to achieve?
- What would you like to be different?

R

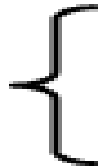
Reality



- Where are you now?
- What is happening at the moment?
- What have you tried so far?
- What are possible and current obstacles?

O

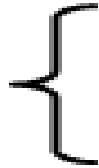
Options



- What are my options?
- What are the benefits and pitfalls of these options?
- What else can you do?

W

Way  
Forward



- What steps do I need to take to complete my goal?
- What support do you need?
- When do you need to take those steps?
- How and when will you get your support?

**Notes**

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## ACTION PLANNING

An **action plan** is a key tool to enhance the skill development process. An action plan is a written document that describes the steps that will help maximize the coaching process.

In developing an action plan, keep in mind these important points:

- Write activities as distinct steps that are realistic, measurable, and attainable.
- Clearly identify responsibilities for employee and supervisor.
- Develop a specific time schedule for completing activities.
- Identify resources necessary to complete the activities, including plans for acquiring those resources.

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# ACTION PLANNING

Sample Action Plan (Family Planning/Counseling)				
<b>Learner:</b> Sally Jones Training Intervention: Family Planning/Counseling Update				<b>Date:</b> April 7, 200X
<b>Support Team:</b>	Supervisor: Jack Thomas	Co-Workers: Tim Miller, Lee Chin		
<b>Specific Areas to Improve:</b> <i>(Think about distinct accomplishments and activities to be achieved.)</i>	I want to improve my ability to provide appropriate counseling about Family Planning methods.			
<b>Problems to Overcome:</b> <i>(Describe the barriers that must be eliminated or reduced and how this will be done.)</i>	I don't have access to a setting for confidential conversations. Identify and discuss possible options with clinic supervisor.			
<b>Detailed Specific Actions in Sequence</b> <i>(Include regular progress reviews with the support team as a part of the specific actions.)</i>	Responsible Person(s)	Resources	Date/Time	Changes to Look For
<b>Step 1:</b> Participate in post-training meeting to review and endorse my action plan (and Tim Miller's); compare with/update procedures manual as needed (follow-up to pre-training meeting).	Entire support team	Action plans; procedures manual	May 1 2 pm	Plans and manual; teams roles/ actions clarified
<b>Step 2:</b> Rearrange furniture in the clinic supervisor's office to create small private area for counseling.	Sally, Tim	Chairs and tables	May 2 2 pm	Staff using space appropriately
<b>Step 3:</b> Assemble box of FP method samples to use during counseling sessions (store on shelf in counseling area for all providers to use).	Sally, Lee	Box and supplies from stock	May 2 2 pm	Samples always ready to use
<b>Step 4:</b> Create poster that encourages clients to ask their provider about FP; hand in waiting area.	Sally, Tim, Lee	Poster board and markers	May 3 2 pm	Clients reading poster and asking questions
<b>Step 5:</b> Review counseling job aid and notes from training activity; place job aid on table in counseling area.	Sally	Job aid from training	May 3 2 pm	Feel ready for practice session
<b>Step 6:</b> Conduct a practice counseling session with co-worker in counseling area, using FP samples and job aid.	Sally, Tim	Counseling area; samples; job aid	May 4 2 pm	Build confidence; ensure suitability of space design
<b>Step 7:</b> Observe and provide feedback during practice counseling session (Tim and Lee to practice as well).	Jack, Tim, Lee	Counseling skills checklist	May 4 2 pm	Useful feedback (peer/supervisor)
<b>Step 8:</b> Participate in action plan review session; revise and/or update plan depending on progress to date.	Entire team	Action plan	May 7 2 pm	Team agrees that I'm ready to counsel clients
<b>Step 9:</b> Orient clients and counsel those interested in FP; document issues/questions	Sally	Notes	May 11 Ongoing	Increase in clients choosing a FP method
<b>Step 10:</b> Discuss questions/issues with co-workers and supervisor (as needed)	All peers	Notes	Ongoing	Insights regarding improvements
<b>Step 11:</b> Observe counseling session and provide feedback (Tim and Lee to be rated as well).	Sally, Jack	Skills checklist	Ongoing	Ensure proficiency matches standard

## ACTION PLANNING

Sample Action Plan				
Employee				Date:
Support Team:	Supervisor:	Co-Workers:		
Specific Areas to Improve: <i>(Distinct activities and accomplishments to be achieved.)</i>				
Problems to Overcome: <i>(Describe the barriers that must be eliminated or reduced and how this will be done.)</i>				
Detailed Specific Actions in Sequence <i>(Include regular progress reviews with the support team as a part of the specific actions.)</i>	Responsible Person(s)	Resources	Date/Time	Changes to Look For
Step 1:				
Step 2:				
Step 3:				
Step 4:				
Step 5:				

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# GIVING CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

Improving an employee performance problem by giving corrective feedback can be uncomfortable and challenging. The words a supervisor chooses will determine the outcome of the coaching session. Phrases like “bad attitude,” or “poor team player” will put the employee on the defensive and undermine a supervisor’s efforts to positively influence an employee’s performance.

## Steps in the Corrective Feedback Process

**1. Identify/describe the behavior** – Do this in order for the employee to understand that a performance problem exists. Describe current behaviors that you want redirected to improve performance. Identify the specific situations (dates and times) when you observed the behaviors. Describe the effect of the current behaviors on the organization, the work group, and the employee.

- Give the feedback at the appropriate time (as close in time as possible).
- Give the feedback in the appropriate place (privately, not in front of other employees).
- Focus on the problem, not the person. Use “I” and “we” messages as much as possible.

**2. Describe the expectations** – When describing expectations, describe them in the form of what you want to happen, not what you do not want to happen.

**EXAMPLE:** “I expect you to use the spell check function before you print your reports” is better than “Quit giving me reports with typos.”

- **Ask questions about causes and discuss solutions** – Get the employee’s input then decide on a solution, including timetables.
- **Write down a plan** – Discuss and outline a specific plan to review progress and, if necessary, change the coaching strategy.

**Notes:**

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD DOCUMENTATION

Good documentation is about performance. It centers on behavior, not on “attitude”. The main reason to focus on behavior, and not attitude, is that behavior is *external* while attitude is *internal*. The first can be documented, the second is next to impossible to document. This requires proper documentation. Below is a guideline for what can be properly documented. For more information on documenting, the Department of State Civil Service offers an online course on how to document performance: *Documenting for Performance and Discipline*

Attitude	Behavior
Attitude occurs “between the ears” of each person. It is not possible for others to objectively note the internal thoughts of someone else.	Behavior occurs in the external world that we can observe. It is possible to objectively note behavior (what is done and what was said).
Opinion	Facts
Opinions are the thoughts or feelings we have about someone's behavior. Often this includes our own assumptions about <i>why</i> a person did something. While an opinion about a person's behavior may happen to be true, that opinion is still a guess. A guess cannot substitute for a fact in documentation.	Facts are different from opinions because a fact is both <u>neutral</u> and <u>observable</u> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Neutral – a fact does not require a point of view to be true. It is what it is.</li><li>• Observable – behavior is a fact, what</li><li>• What someone does or says is behavior. Both can be objectively documented.</li></ul>
Internal	External
The opinions we hold about the attitudes of other people are subjective. Opinions are our internal thoughts about someone else's internal thoughts, and opinions are not objective enough to support performance feedback that requires factual information.	When documentation focuses on external behavior and neutral facts – without subjectively interpreting them – that documentation is useful information and will support positive and negative performance feedback.

## ATTITUDE OR BEHAVIOR?

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**Small Group Activity** For each item, decide in your groups whether it is a attitude or behavior.

1. Likes his supervisor
2. Dislikes her job
3. Operates a computer
4. Types 60 words per minute
5. Is an effective supervisor
6. Is often late for work
7. Says she likes her supervisor
8. Was absent from work three times last month
9. Has an irritating voice
10. Works diligently
11. Is late for work at least once every week
12. Is a hard worker
13. Is very cooperative
14. Has had the highest average production in our department for the last 3 months
15. Argues with me every time I ask him to work overtime
16. Is the best supervisor in the district
17. Is the fastest typist in the office
18. Is the best typist in the office
19. Knows more about inventory than anyone else

# GIVING CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

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**Group Activity** See the three situations on the next three pages:

- 1 person will be the coach
- 1 person will be the employee
- 1-2 people will be the observer (s) – observer role described on the page after the last situation.

## Situation #1

The person who assumes the role of the coach should use the space provided to write what he or she will say when giving corrective feedback.

Behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

Effect: \_\_\_\_\_

Expectation: \_\_\_\_\_

Result: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Coach's Role**

Your supervisor called you “on the carpet” today for not getting the productivity report in on time. You were late because your own employee, Richard, was late getting the information to you. This is the second time in the past two weeks this has happened. The first week you were able to cover for Richard because your supervisor was out of town the day the report was due. You know that if priorities are not set today, you will have the same problem again next week. You have scheduled a meeting with Richard to discuss the problem.

## **Employee's Role**

The weekly productivity report has been late the last two weeks because the people in Group 3, who were supposed to provide you with their information, have been late. You have asked them to get the information to you, but they were even later this week than last week. You heard that your supervisor was criticized by his supervisor today for being late with the report. Now he has asked to meet with you about the report. You wish there was something you could do, but you do not have authority over Group 3.

# GIVING CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

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## Situation #2

The person who will assume the role of the coach should use the space provided to write what he/she will say when giving corrective feedback.

Behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

Effect: \_\_\_\_\_

Expectation: \_\_\_\_\_

Result: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Coach's Role**

Your unit receives numerous incoming telephone calls from both internal and external customers. Handling those calls is part of the job, but one of your employees who was recently transferred from another unit gets complaints about his telephone manners; i.e., sometimes he's rude. You know it's true (you have a rough clientele), but they still need to be served. But even when the employee is not rude, he just is not helpful. You have overheard him say, "I do not know," "Sorry," and "You will have to call somebody else." He seems to have no concept of customer service. When asked, he says he answers all questions the best way he can. If you take him off the phone, coworkers will see that action as a reward. If you leave him on the phone, he will keep finding new ways of making callers angry. You decide to discuss this with the employee.

### **Employee's Role**

You were transferred into this new job and feel very frustrated. You have never had to deal with rude clients before and your supervisor has given you very little guidance. You have never been given an orientation about your job duties and how to answer questions that you get on the telephone. You feel your supervisor has made assumptions about your ability to do the job. If you could find another job, you would leave. Your frustration is building.

# GIVING CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

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## Situation #3

The person who will play the coach should use the space provided to write what he/she will say when giving corrective feedback.

Behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

Effect: \_\_\_\_\_

Expectation: \_\_\_\_\_

Result: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Coach's Role**

You promoted an employee into a supervisory position six months ago. The employee was an excellent technician and seemed excited about the promotion. You have decided to let this supervisor develop his own supervisory style through trial and error. After a few months you become concerned because the new supervisor's monthly reports are inaccurate and late. Employees have been coming to you with complaints about the supervisor. The supervisor has recommended disciplinary action for employee tardiness but you have not shown full support of the supervisor's recommendations. You recently heard the supervisor reprimanding an employee in the reception area. You wait until the confrontation is over and ask the supervisor to come to your office.

### **Employee's Role**

At first you were really excited about your promotion to a supervisory position. A few people seemed to resent the fact that you were promoted but that didn't bother you. You decided to strictly enforce the attendance policy, even though no other supervisor in the agency was doing so. Your manager has not supported your recommendations to take disciplinary action. You have set performance standards that staff members are not meeting. You are so busy getting other people's work done that you don't have time for your own. You have thought about getting advice from your manager but didn't want to seem like a failure.

# GIVING CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

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## Observer's Role

During the skill practice, your responsibility is to observe the coach and determine how well he/she handles the situation. Use the checklist below to make notes so that you can provide feedback to the group.

1. Did the coach describe the impact of the employee's behaviors?
2. Did the coach get agreement that a problem exists?  
Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how?
3. Did the coach and the employee use joint problem solving and decide on a solution?  
Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how?
4. How involved was the employee?
5. How involved was the coach?
6. Did they agree on a specific timetable in which to solve the problem?
7. Was a follow-up plan discussed?

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# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX– EXAMPLES OF PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

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### Examples of performance problems related to ability

- Aptitude
- Training
- Resources

#### Aptitude problems

The employee does not know the necessary information or does not have the appropriate education to do the job and therefore cannot carry out the responsibilities. Neither threats nor rewards will make a difference. Look for employees:

- asking the same questions over and over;
- completing unimportant tasks while avoiding more important tasks (this also could indicate training problems);
- showing puzzled looks or expressions;
- taking excessive time to prepare for a task; or
- avoiding tasks that require the use of specific tools and/or techniques.

#### Training problems (and skill problems as well)

Providing the right kind of training is normally the responsibility of the supervisor and the agency. Look at:

- situations where the employee is trying hard to do the work (which means he or she has enough motivation) but is not able to do the work well or is not improving his or her performance;
- misusing tools or equipment;
- failing to use a new tool or technique when it is available;
- repeatedly making mistakes when using a tool or technique;
- failing to take advantage of certain features of a tool, equipment, or computer software;
- showing resistance to change or resisting the completion of a task; or
- failing to interact with clients or coworkers when that is part of the assignment.
- failing to update job descriptions/qualifications used for hiring leading to a mismatch between employees hired and the job requirements.
- any change in (1) the method or (2) the technology used to do a task often leads to performance problems, and those problems usually must be solved with proper training in the new method or new technology.

## EXAMPLES OF PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS, CONT.

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### **Resource problems**

Resources are the tools that an employee needs to do the work assigned to him or her. When an employee has the aptitude and trained skills to do the work, yet is unable to do the work well enough, the problem could be a lack of necessary resources. For performance problems related to resources, look at:

- a lack of functioning equipment and tools;
- a lack of appropriate materials and supplies;
- not having enough time to do the job the right way;
- not having timely access to necessary information; or
- a problem with the work of other employees, when the finished work of one employee is the starting point for another employee's work.

### **Examples of performance problems related to motivation**

- Desire
- Commitment

### **Low desire problems**

The employee does low-to-average quality work. Look for signs of:

- inconsistent performance: the employee improves when confronted by the supervisor, then slacks off after a while; or
- unwillingness to learn a better way to get the job done, possibly because the employee does not like the work in the first place.

### **Low commitment problems**

The employee gets distracted or easily discouraged. Put another way, the employee has problems "sticking to it." Look for signs of:

- starting a task, but not finishing it before going on to something else (being distracted);
- being discouraged with a task when it does not go well at first; or
- lacking confidence that he or she can do a task well.

## STEPS IN THE POSITIVE FEEDBACK PROCESS

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The three main components of this course provide skill-building practice on (a) coaching, (b) corrective feedback, and (c) counseling. Each of these methods can be an effective way to help to improve employee job performance, *depending on the situation*. However, none of those three are designed to recognize good performance when an employee is able to meet or exceed his or her performance expectations.

While giving corrective feedback ("b", above) is necessary, it is also necessary to give positive feedback to an employee when his or her performance meets or exceeds expectations.

Giving positive feedback is a way to "catch the employee doing something right." When recognizing good performance, make sure that the behavior deserves recognition, the reward is appropriate, and the timing is suitable for the situation. Poor recognition practices may be worse than none at all.

- Identify the specific situation when the employee did a good job.
- Describe employee behaviors:
  - Give this feedback to the employee in a timely manner.
  - Tailor the feedback to meet the employee's needs (in public, in private, in writing, etc.).
- Describe the positive effects of the employee's behavior so that the employee can see how his or her actions impacted customer service, other employees, the supervisor, and/or the agency.